

Outside Leadville

EMILY MORGANTI

I thought we would die on that mountain. Not in my heart but in my head. We came too close to the edge of the rocky ridge and I saw our rented Isuzu Rodeo tipping into the gulch. As he eased us up the narrow pass I wondered how many times the car would flip before we came to rest, and if we'd land facing up or down.

The mountain was made up of little rocks, some so small their sharp edges looked like teeth torn across the centers of moons. The open mouths of pipes looked like animals from a distance, and even after the trees stopped there were tiny yellow flowers.

He gripped the wheel with both hands and didn't speak. Now and then he stopped the car and got out to move a rock. He asked if I wanted to hike down and take a picture of our green SUV idling on the angled road. I said no. I was afraid to see how far we'd come.

When we got to the top we both had to pee. I had to sit on the edge of a flat rock and aim so it wouldn't hit the backs of my thighs. He waited by the car. The air was too thin to breathe. There was no one up there with us. We didn't know yet that we'd meet six cars on the way back down, hugging the edge of the cliff so they could pass. If there had been no one left alive on earth, we wouldn't have known.

We had joked before we started that we would make love on top of the mountain. Up there, we didn't remember. We could see the valley unfolding beneath us like outstretched arms but not the curving road we'd taken.

On our way back down it started raining, but not where we were. The clouds formed a shield across the sky in the direction we were heading.